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ABSTRACT

Intuition is knowledge of something without the conscious use of reasoning. The question of where intuitive knowledge comes from may be addressed from neurophysiological, spiritual, or philosophical perspectives. In some cases, hunches may be traced to the unconscious processing of immediate sensory input with previous knowledge. In other cases, the source of intuitive knowledge is not apparent. Two anecdotes about skiing and fears of avalanche potential illustrate these types of intuitive knowledge. For the administrator of an outdoor program or an outdoor leader in the field, intuition can increase effectiveness in the areas of problem solving, judgment and decision making, route finding, safety management and danger evaluation, assessment of student readiness for adventure activities, staff selection, and group processes. However, intuitive insights must be used in conjunction with logical thinking. Methods of developing intuition include overcoming obstacles such as the fear of looking ridiculous or irrational; thinking of one's intuition as a metaphorical helper; and practicing various techniques such as relaxation, listening to one's inner voice during deliberate periods of silence, paying attention to the symbolism in one's dreams, memory games, creative visualization, and meditation. Contains 11 references. (SV)

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Listen to Your Inner Voice: Using Your Intuition in Outdoor Leadership

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Abstract—All outdoor leaders have the ability to use intuition to become more effective leaders and each of you reading this has intuition. Not only women or gifted people are intuitive, we all have the capacity to tap into our reservoir of intuitive knowledge. The intent of this paper is to help you understand what intuition is and to assist you in becoming more aware of your intuitive knowledge and to value and trust your intuition in order for you to use intuitive knowledge in outdoor recreation. Specifically we will look at definitions and sources of intuitive knowledge, applications to outdoor recreation and ways of developing your intuition.

Defining Intuition

The first step in using your intuition is to define it for yourself so that you can recognize intuitive knowledge. Everyone's experiences of intuition is unique and personal definitions will vary. Close your eyes and take a few minutes to think about what intuition means to you personally; what form does your voice take?

What did you come up with? It will be somewhat different for you than for anyone else. It is often a physical sensation such as a "gut feeling" experienced in the stomach or other part of the body. It is a visual experience for many, described as visions or flashes. It can be experienced as a sound such as an inner voice. Other descriptions of intuition are hunches, premonitions, higher self, and insights. Can you add to this list? Take the time now to jot down how you experience your intuition. What part of your body speaks to you?

Dictionary definitions for intuition include: "direct perception of truth independent of any reasoning process" (Random House) and "the immediate knowing of something without the conscious use of reasoning" (Webster). It is non-rational as opposed to rational but should not be confused with irrational. In other words, it is "knowing without knowing how you know", but valid nonetheless.

How many times has the telephone rang or the doorbell rung and you've known who it is before answering? Or have you ever thought of someone out of the blue and then received a letter or phone call from them? Or have you ever dreamt of something which has come true later?

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These are examples of your intuition at work. We will consider outdoor related examples later. Can you think of any other everyday examples?

Source of Intuitive Knowledge

Where does this special knowledge come from? The answer to this question will vary depending on whether it is approached from a neurophysiological, spiritual, philosophical or other perspective. There is controversy about whether intuition is a physical or a spiritual power (Jackson, 1989, p.17). I will present a few different ideas and you must decide what fits you best. The important point is for you to learn to accept and trust your intuition.

Bill Kautz, founder of the Centre for Applied Intuition in Fairfax, California presents a model which includes the conscious, subconscious, and super conscious minds and explains the flow of information between them. Intuitive knowledge presents itself when information which is universal and transcends time and space flows from the super conscious and information such as feelings, fears, memories, and incomplete experiences stored in the subconscious, flow to the conscious mind (as presented in Sullivan, 1992, p.44). This model is similar to Carl Jung's schema in which there are two layers of the unconscious - the personal and the collective. The model also fits with Nadel's differentiation of two types of intuitive knowledge - with precedent and without precedent, as described below.

"Intuitive knowing with precedent" is the synthesis of information stored in the unconscious memory and then presented to the conscious mind (Nadel, 1990). In other words, there is a precedent for having acquired information through the five senses. Some people compare this to tacit knowing as described in The Tacit Dimension (Polanyi, 1983).

I'm sure many of you have experienced intuitive knowing with precedent. I remember the following experience very clearly:

The common adventure group on a backcountry ski trip is switchbacking up a slope with poor visibility and snow is swirling all around. For no apparent reason I am becoming more and more anxious about our choice of route and why we are continuing. I voice my concerns to the group but they continue. The dialogue begins in my head. "Am I overreacting? Why am I so nervous? Am I just having an off day or is there a legitimate reason for my "gut feeling" that something is wrong?" As is often the case I can come up with no concrete answers but my feelings are too strong to ignore. We stop and dig a snow pit. There is a very weak layer in the snow pack and the group members most experienced with avalanches become alarmed. We descend with caution.

This is an example of intuitive knowing with precedent because I had taken avalanche courses which taught about the relationship of slope aspect, angle, wind action, etc. and I'd had enough experience to feel layers in the snowpack. All the information was being unconsciously collected, and along with previous information and experience was synthesized, producing an intuitive feeling that it was unsafe.

"Intuitive knowing without precedent" is described as "no precedent for having acquired knowledge through your five senses" (Nadel, 1990). An example of this is another ski incident, which occurred prior to my having any avalanche training, when for no apparent reason I became very concerned about the slope we were skiing across and thought we should turn back. My experienced partner insisted on continuing and moments later he was sliding in a small avalanche. I would describe this as intuitive knowing without precedent or as "psychic" intuition, as I had no knowledge or experience to interpret the sensory information.

Brain function is complex and researchers are not in agreement about it. De Beauport says. "It's important to realize that intuition is an intellectual skill. It is a brain state you can shift to" (as quoted

in Nadel, 1990, p.9). Her multiple intelligence theory is based on the Triune Brain Model or the "three-in-one" brain as identified by MacLean (Nadel, 1990,p.11). The three brains are: the reptilian or primal brain which creates patterns, routines, habits and instinctive behavior: the limbic system of paleomammalian which is the site of emotions: and the neocortex or neomammalian which is the top brain and is divided into the left and right hemispheres. The left hemisphere is associated with rational processes whereas the right brain is linked with intuition. Both hemispheres can function simultaneously which means you can think rationally and intuitively at the same time; this is whole-brain thinking. This model is easy to understand and may help us to imagine our intuition at work, but according to Jackson the brain is far too complex for such a simple dichotomy (1989, p.19). It is not necessary to understand the neurophysiology of the brain to know that intuition is real; we must claim the unmeasured.

Using Inuition in Outdoor Recreation

Whether you are an administrator of an outdoor program or an outdoor leader in the field, listening to your intuition will augment your effectiveness in the following areas:

1. Problem Solving

Solving problems through flashes rather than reasoning is intuitive problem solving. Albert Einstein in reference to his theory of relativity said: "I did not arrive at my understanding of the functional laws of the universe through my rational mind."

2. Judgement and Decision Making

The role of intuition in gathering information necessary to make sound judgements and decisions is explained by Greenleaf as follows;

"There is usually an information gap between the information at hand and what is needed. The art of leadership rests, in part, on the ability to bridge that gap by intuition, that is, a judgement from the conscious profess...intuition is a feel for patterns, the ability to generalize on what has happened previously...Leaders, therefore, must be more creative than most; and creativity is largely discovery, a push into the uncharted and the unknown" (1977).

This is a very broad area and the categories below also relate to decision making; but I have chosen to list them separately.

3. Routefinding

On many occasions I have had a sense of the best route without understanding why or being able to articulate how I selected the route.

4. Safety Management/Danger Evaluation

Most outdoor participants have experienced premonitions of danger or something being "not just right". I have often felt this and the experience below taught me not to ignore these intuitive feelings.

Two friends and I went to kayak the Kicking Horse River. I felt apprehensive as we approached the river and told my partners I wanted a warm-up before paddling the more difficult section. As we were putting our boats on the water I experienced a very strong feeling that I shouldn't be paddling . My logical rational side told me everything was fine and to stop being such a wimp! That day is one I won't forget. I became pinned against a rock under water, thought it was game over but managed to get flushed off the rock only to be recirculated in several holes and almost miss the take-out , which might very well have resulted in death. All in all a very nasty swim and I certainly gained respect for my inner voice. Of course the rational mind might argue that my apprehension caused me to lack confidence which led to the incident. Of course that is likely true but it makes the messages about danger no less real.

5. Student Assessment

As outdoor instructors and leaders a big part of our job is to continually assess students readiness for adventure activities. We often base these decisions on our gut feelings.

6. Staff Selection

First impressions about potential staff often turn out to be accurate.

7. Group Process

During debriefs and other process activities leaders often have a sense of the group and where it needs to go. For example they seem to know what questions to ask, how deep to go, when to back off, etc. However, facilitators may also be directed by their own agenda based on their needs and "baggage", caution must be used when facilitating groups so as to not be misguided by what you perceive as intuition.

Accuracy of Intuitive Knowledge and Cautions

"To accurately translate your insights into right knowledge, you must arm yourself with the two-edged sword of discrimination and learn to distinguish illusion with reality" (LaPuma, 1991, p.134).

Intuition is skill and must be developed like any other skill. I encourage you to listen to your intuition and learn to trust it, but at the same time it is important to be cautious because your intuition may not always be accurate, especially at first. The subconscious, as well as storing information and insights, also holds emotions and other areas of vulnerability which have been suppressed. It is therefore important to learn to differentiate between types of information you are receiving and to also use your rational, logical mind to confirm your intuitive insights.

Jackson explains in his book Executive ESP, "The idea isn't to develop intuition to the exclusion of logical thinking, but to use these abilities in conjunction with each other. It's analogous to the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain; each controls different abilities, yet both sides are necessary to the expressed human being" (1989, p.26)

Developing Your Intuition

1. Obstacles

The first thing you need to develop your intuition is to overcome your barriers. Jackson has identified fear, habit and stress as obstacles to intuition (1989, p.26) Fear of the unknown, fear of failure or success, fear of looking ridiculous or irrational are examples of fear we must overcome. It is helpful to read about respected scientists or other professionals who rely on intuition and to talk to outdoor leaders who have examples of using their intuition. It will also help to keep a record of your hunches and their accuracy so you begin to trust them and no longer fear making mistakes or appearing irrational.

For most of us it is habitual to think logically as that is how we have been taught. It is difficult to let go of this linear process and to validate the non-rational. It may help to mess up your environment so that things are not orderly or to participate in exercises where you allow your thoughts to be spontaneous and not thought out. Many of the techniques below will help you to change the habit of not using your intuition.

In order to overcome the barrier of stress read the section below on relaxation. Before we move on, can you identify or elaborate on your own obstacles and come up with your own ideas on how to overcome them?

2. Think Metaphorically

Think of a metaphor or image to represent your intuition. Some people refer to their intuition as a child within , others refer to it as the priestess or third eye. Come up with your own image or symbol which can identify with and feel comfortable communicating with. Once you have done this you can get to your intuitive icon. Honor your intuition, listen to it and record your intuitive experiences. Nurture it and spend time developing it. Remember to praise and reward it and thank it. This may sound silly but it does work.

3. Getting In shape Intuitively

Tuning up your listening skills, receptivity, sensitivity, and becoming more aware of your of your intuition at work will help get you in shape intuitively. Below are some techniques to get you started.

Relaxation will allow you to open yourself to intuition. It is difficult to tune into your intuitive messages if you are stressed. It is important to take time out and elicit the "relaxation response", a physiological response identified by Benson which counteracts the stress response. Progressive relaxation, Autogenic Training, Meditation, Tai Chi, Yoga, Massage, Visualization, and Breathing Exercises are examples of some of the many available relaxation techniques you may use to relax and get in tune with your inner self. It is important to pick a technique that works for you and then to practice that technique daily, ideally in the morning and evening for ten to twenty minutes.

Silence helps us listen to our inner voices. As an outdoor leader it is important to withdraw from the group to have some quiet time to reflect and listen. LaPuma believes that "silence is the doorway to the unconscious" (1991, p.135). She write: "our role is to withdraw from outer involvement and listen to the sound of silence. Only in silence can find that place inside where all answers lie: our special place of infinite knowing. There the voice of our soul speaks without words so we may hear without sound". (1991, p.134).

Dreams are an excellent source of intuitive knowledge, help solve problems and working with them teaches about the symbolic language of the super conscious. Take time to write down your dreams and discover for yourself what the objects, events, and characters symbolize to you.

Discussing your dreams with others, such as in a dream study group, will also help you to understand the messages within. To help solve a problem ask yourself a specific question. During the day rehearse your question or even write it in your journal. Before going to sleep repeat your question and visualize your question being answered. Be positive and persistent. It may take several nights before you have a clear dream answer. By writing down your dream and examining the key images the meaning may become clear. The technique of asking a question can also be used before meditating, writing in your journal or selecting a tarot card. This is a very brief explanation on how to use your dreams. To help you utilize dreams as a valuable source of information read a book on dream study or take a dream workshop.

Memory games where you try to remember past events including details such as smells and feelings are useful exercises to practice daily, as the process of remembering is similar to the process of how intuitive information is received.

Creative visualization is particularly useful if you have difficulty remembering your dreams. Daydreams or stories you imagine while awake will also provide intuitive information and help you to think metaphorically and symbolically. Below is an example. Before starting, take time to become focused and comfortable. If possible have someone read the scenario to you or tape it. Feel free to

create your own scenario or visualization.

Visualize that you are travelling down a stream in a boat. Picture what type of boat you are in, what you see on either side, the smells. Feel the sun warm on your face. How are you feeling? You continue along on the stream and presently you arrive at a tunnel. You enter the tunnel and it becomes very dark. What are you feeling as you pass through in the darkness. Presently, you leave the tunnel and return to the brightness. You arrive at a beautiful meadow. As you get out of your boat, you notice a person sitting on the grass. Imagine what the person looks like. You begin a conversation with this person. Write this conversation below.

Meditation is a practice which is performed daily (even if only five minutes) will help you become more in touch with your intuition. Try sitting quietly and repeating the word one or if you prefer a visual focus, fix gaze on a candle or other object. If other thoughts arrive, allow them to float on by, observing them but not focusing on any one thought.

Summary

Outdoor leaders and administrators will make effective decisions and experience other positive benefits by using whole brain thinking where intuitive knowledge and rational knowledge are combined. To develop this ability, begin by defining and identifying intuition in your own way. Take time to listen to and record your intuitive experiences and the outcomes. This will help you to trust your "gut feelings". Honor, nurture and thank your intuition. It is a special gift which we all possess.

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